

Postmodern Populism

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Today practically all American politicians tend to define themselves as "populists" at some time or other (usually just before elections), which is probably the surest indication that the general understanding of the concept is so vague as to denote everything and nothing.¹ Ross Perot has been described as a populist, but so have Bill Clinton and Ronald Reagan. In political systems predicated on popular sovereignty, politicians allegedly "represent" the people and, therefore, must at least be "populist" in that minimal sense. On closer scrutiny, however, American populism turns out to designate something much more specific.² It is the particular historical form taken by that long-standing tradition of direct democracy, localism

1. This state of affairs is at least partly encouraged by *engagé* historians who, in the frantic effort to find extraneous props for faltering ideological frameworks, attempt to recycle and reinterpret populism by redescribing it in terms of conventional political categories. To the extent that populism has always transcended the standard Left-Right paradigm, however, the results have been frustrating. The usual conclusion they reach is that populism is nothing more than a rhetorical ploy with no particular political content. See, e.g., Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

2. See Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and its Critics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), pp. 177-178; and Robert McMath, Jr., *American Populism: A Social History (1877-1898)* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993). The original study which paved the way for recent reinterpretations of American populism is Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America* (New York: Oxford, 1976). Unfortunately, erudite as it may be, Lasch's account remains too embroiled in recent debates about the nature of republicanism and polemics concerning liberalism vs. communitarianism to articulate satisfactorily the *particularity* of American populism as a direct continuation of a nativist tradition developed out of the colonial experience. As a result, populism either fades into an amorphous Western past rooted as far back as the dawn of Athenian democracy, or is reduced to the level of a clumsy interlocutor of a triumphant liberalism and "bourgeois" ideology. In either case, what ends up occluded is precisely the *historical specificity* of American populism.

and cultural specificity, which goes back a lot further than the latter part of the 19th century when populism first appeared as a distinct political movement. As such, it embodies the legacy of the colonial experience and carries on a distinct American democratic tradition predicated on autonomous self-governing communities. This relatively recent re-interpretation of populism within a broader historical and theoretical context, largely the work of revisionist historians during the past couple of decades, constitutes a radical break with predominant Cold War "end of ideology" readings of the phenomenon, hitherto canonized by influential sectors of both academia and the media. According to this earlier interpretation, populism was associated primarily with the darker side of popular rule: mob rule and collective irrationality reminiscent of the KKK, fascism, racism and the worst expressions of xenophobia.³

Today, both accounts coexist in popular consciousness. This paradoxical state of affairs is reflected by the mass media's ambivalent depiction of the phenomenon: the people are regarded both as the ultimate source of sovereignty *and* as the repository of deep-seated irrationality, necessitating the intervention of a wise elite able to capture collective sensibilities while restraining all other particularistic irrational impulses. What constitutes "collective sensibilities" and "irrational impulses," of course, is often determined primarily by various "wise elites" on the basis of particular Left or Right versions of the same basic New Class ideology.

3. Originally concerned with explaining the rise of fascism and Nazism (in Europe), and McCarthyism (in the US), "end of ideology" intellectuals such as Seymour Martin Lipset, Daniel Bell and Richard Hofstadter simply continued a sociological mode of analysis Lasch traces back to Robert Lynd — a liberal and social democratic tradition seeking to deploy the state to social engineer faltering communities back into working order by undoing the havoc wrought by capitalism. See Lasch, *The True and only Heaven*, *op. cit.*, pp. 424ff. Blinded by the scientistic glare of an uncritically accepted modernism, they saw themselves as neutral, objective social scientists with direct access to true knowledge — the functional equivalent of Hegel's Absolute Spirit. Consequently, they judged all deviations from their implicitly assumed technocratic Enlightenment model as pathological left-overs from an irrational past (the result of what at the time was described as "cultural lag"). Not surprisingly, after the resurgence of what they had dismissed as defunct Left ideology within the far from "neutral and objective" social engineering departments of the "Great Society," they felt compelled to politicize their previously "neutral" technocratic ideology, this time as neo-conservatism, to combat the alleged excesses of the New Left, the counterculture and, most importantly, the impact these 1960s movements were having within the Democratic Party. For a survey of their trajectory, see Frank Fischer, *Technocracy and the Politics of Expertise* (Newberry Park CA: Sage Publications, 1990), pp. 144-177. This neo-conservatism remains one of the most violently anti-populist political forces in the US.

Historically, in Europe the Left has tended to hypostatize these "collective sensibilities" into various "humanistic" versions of "normality" as the universally proper mode of consciousness whose (pre-revolutionary) poselytization and (post-revolutionary) enforcement were subsequently used to legitimate its "progressive" pretenses.⁴ Similarly, in the 20th century the Right, having forsaken all delusions of restoring the *status quo* obtaining prior to the French Revolution, has redefined itself as a reaction against (and a development of) the Left's abstract universalism by identifying these collective sensibilities with "irrational impulses" such as national, ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, etc. traits, whose vindication against "decadence" in general or obliteration in particular has determined its diversified political teleology.⁵ In the US, which never had a feudal past and has always thrived on strong democratic traditions, the Left has been able to institutionalize a therapeutic state very slowly, against strong opposition and only under the pretext of responding to major social crises, while the Right, fragmented and, unsure of its identity, has been mostly concerned with defending predominant power relations and a traditional liberal heritage it never really understood.⁶ In either

4. See Ferenc Feher, "The Dictatorship over Needs" in *Telos* 35 (Spring 1978), pp. 31-42.

5. See Panajotis Kondylis, *Konservatismus: Geschichtlicher Gehalt und Untergang* (Stuttgart: Klett-Kotta, 1986), Part IV, "Die Auflösung des Konservatismus und die Verteilung seines Erbes," pp. 387ff.

6. See Paul Gottfried, *The Conservative Movement*, revised edition (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993); and Samuel Francis, *Beautiful Losers: Essays on the Failure of American Conservatism* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1993). Contrary to Left conventional wisdom, in a society where the legitimacy of exchange relations and property rights has long since ceased to be open for debate — especially after the collapse of communism — bourgeois ideology and the Protestant ethic of the old entrepreneurial capitalists have long ceased to be the predominant conservative orientation. Cf. Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976). Bell, however, stops short of acknowledging that the passive hedonism of much of the counter-culture resulting from the obliteration of tradition he describes is but the other side of the therapeutic ideology of the managerial elite which, under the pretense of fostering democratic values and equality, seeks to homogenize all in terms of an allegedly universal model of "normality." As another epiphenomenon of the same cultural crisis, his technocratic ideology cannot provide a meaningful alternative. Similarly, standard, primarily cost-driven conservative critiques of this therapeutic state miss the main problem, i.e., the fact that, in reducing citizens to clients, this state undermines the conditions for its own reproducibility, not only on the economic level but, first and foremost, by deactivating the kind of responsible citizens needed, among other things, as control mechanisms to prevent the system from precipitating a rationality crisis unresolvable through the only means available to the state: more of the same formal intervention responsible for the crisis in the first place. See Paul Piccone, "The Crisis of One-Dimensionality," and Tim Luke, "Culture and Politics in the Age of Artificial Negativity," both in *Telos* 35 (Spring 1978), pp. 43-72.

case, both versions of New Class ideology have led to what Horkheimer and Adorno described but were never able to fully thematize as the outcome of the "dialectic of enlightenment": "mass deception" resulting from the substitution of one-sided, conceptual representations for multifaceted living practices (the domain of the *doxa*), whose lack of axiological determinacy paved the way for a nihilism legitimating everything and nothing at the same time.⁷

At any rate, when these "wise elites" turn out to be insufficiently wise, as was usually the case whenever they undertook vast projects of social engineering to reconfigure mass consciousness, the results were occasionally problematic and often catastrophic: the liberal democratic welfare state, but also Stalinism, Nazism and fascism. The dynamics conducive to these catastrophic outcomes, however, are inextricably tied to conditions obtaining only in a long gone past, i.e., mostly in countries which have not experienced bourgeois revolutions⁸ and far removed from the present *postmodern* context. Today, populism's lingering sinister reputation is primarily a result of the fact that, during the first part of the 20th century, most instances of populist ferment could not be reduced, as they were within modern, liberal democratic systems such as the US, to mere reformist social movements seeking the implementation of particular policies or modification of specific regulations within a socio-political framework implicitly deemed fundamentally sound. Since these populist movements usually took place in predominantly *premodern* contexts lacking institutional mechanisms for smooth orderly changes, rather

7. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, tr. by John Cumming (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), p. 42. While Horkheimer and Adorno never went so far as to vindicate the populist dimension they unwarrantedly saw as terminally mediatized by the very same ideology whose onesidedness could only be overcome through an organic *lebensweltliche* regrounding, they provided a devastating critique of the New Class long before the term became widely used. Unable to transcend the historical context of which they were two of the most penetrating critics, they chose a strategy of "hybernation" — a theoretical retreat into a conceptual impenetrability thawed only occasionally, in Adorno's case (in *Aesthetic Theory*), by the ability of art and philosophy to cut through the ubiquity of mass deception. The existentialist alternative, also popular at the time, was not acceptable, at least to the extent it was predicated on precisely that same ontological meaninglessness ushered in by the Enlightenment. To them, the populist option could not have been a real objective possibility until the end of the Cold War, after the collapse of the totally administered Soviet society demonstrated that, contrary to their dark forebodings about its indefinite extensibility, the dialectic of enlightenment proved itself to be inherently unstable and inevitably doomed to fail. By that time, however, they were all dead.

8. Cf. Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

than following often inadequate or altogether non-existent legal procedures they tended to implement presumed necessary measures through readily available authoritarian means. From the viewpoint of New Class rationalism, such processes can only appear *irrational* and easy to identify with social groups not known for their ability to articulate their outlook clearly and coherently. Thus it was all too natural to associate populism with authoritarianism and demagoguery *tout court*, thereby discrediting it outright.⁹

Today, when the *premodern* conditions conducive to these disastrous authoritarian outcomes no longer obtain within most of the industrialized world, the prospects of populism as a viable political alternative may be much brighter than at any time in the past. This is also facilitated by the fact that, with the crisis of modernity, the New Class has entered a phase of delegitimation and decline. As a result, populist *anti-modernism* assumes an altogether different meaning. In the age of *postmodernity*, after the collapse of the concept of progress has undermined all unilinear theories of history and dethroned modernity as the ultimate achievement of civilization, the populist rejection of modernity, hitherto regarded as a sign of backwardness and immaturity, now becomes merely another political choice. It can no longer be reduced to a mere deviation or ignorance-driven recalcitrance to accept an otherwise irresistible and unquestionable modernity. The apodicticity of the latter has long since lost what hitherto had been considered its "obvious" character.

Historically, populist sentiments (understood in the very broad — and perhaps too positive — sense of vindicating democratic self-determination, traditional prerogatives and local autonomy against both capitalist and New Class assaults) become politically decisive during serious crises, when "business as usual" is no longer adequate for the tasks at hand. In predominantly *premodern* contexts (as in Latin America and in parts of Europe during the first half of this century), these crises were generally seen as requiring exceptional measures that could be, and were, deployed

9. In his extensive review of the available literature on populism, Taguieff readily locates the predominant liberal elitist biases. Of the two main varieties of populism he distinguishes, "protest" and "identitary," his focus on the latter — because of the growing political relevance of the National Front in France — tends to distort his analysis of the former. Thus he does not see "protest" populism as a logical extension of a long-standing democratic tradition and its resurgence today as inextricably tied with the systematic marginalization of the citizenry as a result of globalization, centralization and depoliticization of liberal, yet increasingly bureaucratic and centralist, regimes. See Pierre-André Taguieff, "Political Science Confronts Populism: From a Conceptual Mirage to a Real Problem," in this issue of *Telos*.

most effectively by extraordinary regimes.¹⁰ In the process, however, the new regimes met considerable internal opposition which, in a context lacking institutionalized mechanisms of conflict mediation and orderly change, often generated violent confrontations. Within such contexts, the eventual repression of the losing side tends to pave the way for the kind of authoritarianism which has discredited *all* varieties of populism, especially since one of the main results of WWII in the West has been the reconfiguration of all states as ordinary welfare states — technocratic New Class versions of populist regimes where democratic deficits are compensated by fiscal irresponsibility. The almost universal institutionalization of liberal democratic regimes, however, did not mean the end of history — an unwarranted generalization of the political paralysis imposed by Cold War imperatives — but only of the logic of modernity. Populism re-emerged with a vengeance once Cold War restraints dissolved and the bankruptcy of modernity became obvious with the potentially terminal fiscal crises of all military-Keynesian regimes.

Beyond Stereotypes

As a not altogether inaccurate, if somewhat simplistic representation, the media depiction of populism as practically every politician's sometimes ideological outlook manages to capture the tragedy of American populism during the last century. Originating as a post-Civil War grassroots movement concerned with vindicating local autonomy and cultural particularity against Northern capitalist and government domination, it never managed to formulate a political program and electoral strategy sufficiently compelling to translate into a viable political coalition. Consequently, it was gradually instrumentalized by turn-of-the-century progressivism

10. This is not a variation of the standard "*Sonderweg*" reading of German history or of the "passive revolution" interpretation of Italian unification, whereby the backwardness of both countries is deployed to explain why they turned to Nazism or fascism. Such an obviously Panglossian and conformist historiography presupposes a "natural" trajectory of *national* development from premodernity to a liberal democratic regime assumed to be the arrival point of any "normal" country. Not only is there nothing intrinsically natural and necessary about either nation-states or liberal democracy, but today both institutions are either obsolete or so crisis-ridden that their persistence much beyond the 20th century is in serious doubt. See Paul Piccone, "The Crisis of Liberalism and the Emergence of Federal Populism," in *Telos* 89 (Fall 1991), pp. 7-44. One of the paradoxes of the 20th century is that the two world wars have resulted not only in the obliteration of barbaric regimes, but also in the universalization of the liberal-democratic nation-state as the only viable political model, precisely when liberalism was rapidly marginalizing its "democratic" attribute and most hitherto sovereign nation-states were becoming increasingly obsolete and suzerainized by Cold War power politics.

and eventually became an integral part of the New Deal coalition within which the original democratic impulse evaporated into the *de facto* benevolent dictatorship of technocratic managers. This problematic historical trajectory helps explain why it is possible and even legitimate not only for practically every new political organization but also for both major American political parties to identify with populism. The Democrats appeal to what populism eventually became¹¹ after it was instrumentalized by the progressivism of the rising American New Class — a politically legitimate variation of bureaucratic centralism — whereby a powerful redistributive apparatus corrects market-created social imbalances, allegedly in the interests of the “underprivileged” and at the expense of powerful economic interests. For their part, the Republicans generally refer to an earlier notion of populism, predating its subsequent statist involution and emphasizing local autonomy, particularity and differences.¹²

In the case of the Democrats’ progressive version of populism, the New Deal’s state intervention and social engineering fostered a social homogenization reducing a substantial part of the population to the level of passive state-dependent clients. One of the main unintended consequences has been a significant decline of that individuality without which the system loses its main internal control mechanisms, stagnates and becomes increasingly unable to effectively reproduce itself, eventually precipitating the kind of rationality, motivational and economic crises typical of almost all advanced industrial societies.¹³ As for the Republican version, the *proposed* vindication of populism takes the form of dismantling the federal

11. This is the kind of populism Kazin longs for, although he finds it too embroiled in a “politically correct” language to be of any use today. See Kazin, *op. cit.*, pp. 282ff. Allegedly, the present task is to sanitize the traditional version of populism and prevent it from deteriorating into the kind of abstract universalism typical of, e.g., Jackson’s otherwise eloquent appeal (*op. cit.*, p. 279). However, Kazin, along with most other self-described Left populists, falls into the trap of misreading populism as a domestic variety of Marxism in need of shedding its ethnocentricity without at the same time ceasing to be paradigmatically American. For similar aporias, see Harry C. Boyte and Frank Riessman, eds., *The New Populism: The Politics of Empowerment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); and Harry C. Boyte, Heather Booth and Steve Max, *Citizen Action and the New American Populism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986). For a critique of this approach, see Piccone, “The Crisis of Liberalism . . .” *op. cit.*, pp. 26-28.

12. Unfortunately, Republicans have tended to deploy this populist rhetoric primarily for opportunistic reasons, while in fact following standard statist redistributive strategies. See David Frum, *Dead Right* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); and Gottfried, *The Conservative Movement*, *op. cit.* Even the recent federal strategy of distributing bloc grants to states, rather than directly providing services, still retains the federal government’s redistributive role.

13. Piccone, “The Crisis of Liberalism . . .,” *op. cit.*

bureaucratic apparatus without simultaneously attempting to generate the conditions which would prevent the creation of problems almost as serious as those to be solved. Within a context characterized by widespread state dependence, the Republican strategy threatens to generate the counterproductive results of increasing existing social inequalities and further marginalizing considerable sectors of the population. It would (as it did in the 1980s, when it was only minimally deployed) strengthen existing relations of domination by privileging a general socio-economic freedom which, under existing conditions, can only be exercised by a few to the detriment of the many. When the competitors are neither equal nor likely to become so in the immediate future, merely levelling the field amounts to intensifying already debilitating social inequalities.¹⁴

Despite these problems, as a result of the crisis of ungovernability, populism today is increasingly capturing widespread anti-state sentiments both within the traditional Right and what remains of the traditional Left, accelerating the disintegration of entrenched political polarities.¹⁵ But if everyone is tendentially a populist, what does it mean to be *for* or *against* populism? What can the original populism — a 19th century grass-roots movement of mostly dispossessed Southern and Mid-Western farmers — mean today in a postmodern, largely industrial and urban society besieged by radically different problems?

From the viewpoint of opponents of populism, the most familiar negative characterization of the movement remains that provided by "end of ideology social scientists": a mob of "know-nothing" farmers in overalls, brandishing pitchforks, lynching blacks and chasing Jews, immigrants and other "undesirable elements" out of town. Obviously, this is not what today's politicians have in mind when they identify themselves as populists. Rather, the more positive, idyllic self-image of a populist politician is that of a member of a community who does politics (but is not *really* a

14. This is not an argument for remedial measures such as "affirmative action," which end up insuring that the field is never levelled and reifying into a permanent state of inadequacy those who, for whatever reason, cannot compete effectively. One of the most debilitating results is that the alleged beneficiaries of "affirmative action," as a result end up requiring indefinite handicapping. See Hugh Murray, "The Case Against Affirmative Action," in *Telos* 93 (Fall 1992), pp. 145-158; and Paul Piccone, "Artificial Negativity as a Bureaucratic Tool? Reply to Roe," in *Telos* 86 (Winter 1990-91), pp. 127-140. A more viable *populist* approach would be to encourage the constitution or reconstitution of local, autonomous institutional arrangements within whose structured context those who find themselves marginalized can not only function, but also overcome, wherever possible, the conditions of their marginalization.

15. See Lasch, *op. cit.*, chap. 1 "Introduction: The Obsolescence of Left and Right."

professional politician). Because of his inextricable rootedness in the community, he can cut through the usual alienated modes of interest representation (deemed one-sided, inadequate and therefore tendentially corrupt) to articulate directly needs and desires he experiences in his everyday life along with his constituents. In other words, the populist politician's distinguishing feature is *direct access* to the very same precategorical dimension rationalists and liberals dismiss as "irrational" and, consequently, responsible for most major 20th century authoritarian involutions.

What distinguishes today's supporters from most of the opponents of populism is not so much their different evaluation of the same phenomenon as an altogether different conceptualization of what it actually is. While opponents focus on the xenophobic characteristics of earlier, mostly foreign premodern manifestations of populism, predicated on various combinations of traits such as ethnicity, race, kinship, religion, language etc., defenders have in mind a not yet fully formulated *postmodern* model according to which the *organicity* of the communities constituting the most fundamental political units is a function of adherence to and internalization of collectively shared rules and regulations concerning social behavior, conflict resolution, general expectations, etc.¹⁶ The defining characteristics of that *Verfassungspatriotismus* advocated by Habermas in a disingenuous attempt to relegitimate the nation-state as presumably inhabited by nothing but New Class operatives constantly verbalizing all reality and reaching consensus after careful deliberation, i.e., a commitment to the *fundamental* rules of the game as embodied in a constitutional document, are also what determine the postmodern organicity of the new communities.¹⁷ At the national level, the rules of the game can only be formal, codified and, therefore, incomplete, since they necessarily miss the *lebensweltliche* pre-formal dimension of being, while in

16. This may have to do with the biographies of both supporters and opponents of populism. While supporters tend to be mostly WASPs with no direct acquaintance with anything other than paradigmatically American experiences, opponents such as "end of ideology social scientists" tend to be second or third generation Americans for whom the horrors of various European "populist" manifestations remain important reference points. As these memories recede, however, personal idiosyncrasies are likely to become less relevant and restrict the opponents of populism to hard-line New Class ideologists consciously aware of the privileges and prerogatives at stake in serious populist reforms.

17. See Jürgen Habermas, "Historical Consciousness and Post-Traditional Identity: The Federal Republic's Orientation to the West," in *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, ed. and tr. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), pp. 249-267. See also Dorl Sternberger, *Verfassungspatriotismus* (Frankfurt a/M: Insel Verlag, 1990).

organic communities face-to-face interaction, tradition, custom and other extra-conceptual modes of communication remedy such inadequacy by complementing the merely conceptual. Because of this broader focus on the micro-level and a narrower setting of jurisdictional boundaries, organic communities do not generate the myriads of unintended consequences (such as social disintegration, motivational crises, etc.) resulting from the one-sided character of formal modes of communication and interaction. As with all *living* traditions, the organicity of postmodern communities is also dynamic, constantly reconstituting itself to account for new situations or to incorporate new elements within a subtly shifting configuration of those traditions and customs constituting the preconditions for living practices.¹⁸ Conventional social science folklore¹⁹ dismisses organic communities as defunct by defining them as so closed, self-contained and isolated that it is practically impossible to locate any of them — today or any time in the

18. See the *Telos* "Special Issue on Tradition," No. 94 (Winter 1993-94).

19. Contrary to the dark forebodings of New Class sociologists, modernization has not overwhelmed whatever "organic communities" there ever were in the US. Rather, their survival and continued viability is a function of their ability to resist or otherwise avoid modernizing pressures. In their mid-1950s study of a paradigmatic rural (organic) community, Vidich and Bensman not only projected the imminent obliteration of such communities but, in typical "end of ideology" style, warned about the potential fascist implications of what they saw as "fundamental and perhaps irreversible trends in the very structure of American society." According to the authors, a "populism gone sour could become the source of an antidemocratic, quasi-totalitarian reaction which in spite of its origins in an earlier democratic ideology could turn against the new cultural styles evolving in our society." See Arthur J. Vidich and Joseph Bensman, *Small Town in Mass Society: Class Power and Religion in a Rural Community*, revised edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 346-47. Four decades after the study was completed, "Springdale" has yet to succumb to any of these "fundamental . . . irreversible trends." The village still has no fast-food facilities or other obvious signs of irreversible "modernization," and it still runs pretty much the way it did in the 1950s by the direct descendants of those very people Vidich and Bensman ridicule in their "scientific" treatise and, more importantly, by scores of new villagers who have moved in since and who, contrary to dark forebodings of "populist" intolerance, xenophobia and suspicion of outsiders, have become integral members of an ever changing, dynamic organic community. As a result, there is practically no crime in the village, the local government remains one of the most responsible in the state, and the quality of life, if anything, has improved since the study was made. The people have adapted whatever modern technology they have found useful, but social life is still organized by the several local churches. As for "populism," it has yet to go "sour" and there are no signs of creeping fascism anywhere. Direct democracy and face-to-face interaction still characterize local political life and no fundamental changes seem necessary to confront the 21st century — a future for which the village seems to be better prepared than most large American cities. Unlike the Lynds' *Middletown*, ravaged by the impact of a profit-driven industrialism, Springdale has not gone the way of Muncie, Ind. and, in the age of cybernation, it is no longer even threatened by those problems. See Lasch, *op. cit.*, pp. 424ff. for an account of the instrumentalization of the apotheosis of Middletown to buttress New Deal interventionist policies.

past. But organic communities are much more pedestrian than those quaint esoteric entities depicted in modernist fairytales. They did not disappear with the horse and buggy. They thrive wherever people retain a memory of their past and manage their life independently of any intrusive managerial elite seeking to enforce state-mandated "normality" — New Class ideological constructs legitimated by pseudo-universality and "objectivity."

Unlike neo-Kantian *Verfassungspatriotismus*, postmodern populist organicity is neither purely procedural nor exhaustively spelled out in explicit rules and regulations, i.e., relegated to that formal dimension of social reality which, because of its increasing complexity and technicality, becomes the exclusive domain of intellectuals, lawyers and bureaucrats, and eventually the decisive exclusionary mechanism demarcating the New Class in opposition to an increasingly clientized population.²⁰ It obtains within pluralist communities where differences are not just respected as defining immutable "multicultural" essences fixed once and for all but coexist as living practices gradually blending into a new ethos which constitutes that particular community's evolving cultural specificity.²¹ Of course, the inescapable mediation of the ubiquitous culture industry guarantees that these evolving particularities operate within a generally shared cultural horizon allowing for smooth interaction with similarly constituted contiguous communities. These evolving cultural particularities²² are essential to prevent state-mandated social homogenization from obliterating the personal identity and individuality of those

20. See Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology: The Origins, Grammar and Future of Ideology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p. 64.

21. Once again, the counter-examples of Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Bosnia, etc. immediately frighten scientific, a-historical modernists into calling for a powerful central state as the guarantor of personal safety and human rights within an otherwise *bellum omnium contra omnes*. As in the previously discussed case of populist authoritarianism, however, all these counter-examples are manifestations of cultural conflicts resulting from ethnic identities unable to transcend their pre-modern limitations. No such problems obtain in postmodern contexts, where ethnicity and territoriality are no longer inextricably connected. Unlike the modernists' "post-traditional" identity, which redescribes the same old bourgeois abstract individualism within the hieroglyphics of "the theory of communicative action," thus recycling all its problems as well, postmodern populist identity remains rooted in the *lebensweltliche* territorial dimension while avoiding the rapidly fading constraints of pre-modern provincialism. For a conformist account of recent efforts to recycle modernist concepts of identity, see Martin Matustik, *Postnational Identity: Critical Theory and Existential Philosophy in Habermas, Kierkegaard, and Havel* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993).

22. New Class ideology, of course, sees the matter from an entirely different perspective and considers the traditional family the source of "working-class authoritarianism," rather than the cradle of autonomous individuality. See Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, *op. cit.*, pp. 461-463.

who no longer have the privilege of living within the confines of traditional families or their equivalents. In a context where high divorce rates and other factors contribute to the disintegration of family life, there are few other alternatives to state-dependence, passivity and the kind of clientism typical of most American urban communities ravaged by the social engineering of the past six decades. What is essential here is the possibility of reconstituting the kind of individuality whose disintegration the first generation of critical theorists identified as responsible for the rise of 20th century authoritarianism. Because of their direct experiences of fascism and Nazism, however, they could not foresee any remedy through a postmodern populist strategy of deploying strong organic communities as substitutes for the decline of traditional social mechanisms conducive to the constitution of autonomous individuality.²³

Populist Philosophical Foundations? Dewey as a Populist

Here is where a postmodern version of populism, a movement usually dismissed as anti-intellectual and lacking any systematic theoretical articulation, much less a sophisticated philosophical foundation, connects not only with that paradigmatically American legacy of pragmatism in general and John Dewey in particular — the closest populism has ever come to a

23. Whereas the Frankfurt School originally rushed to the premature conclusion that the culprit was capitalism and its weakening of traditional forms of authority, first and foremost within the family, it would have been more accurate to point to the community disintegration brought about by a prior national integration and homogenization, which subsequently paved the way for the smooth substitution of market relations for traditional ones. See Institut für Sozialforschung, *Studien über Autorität und Familie* (Paris: Alcan, 1936). In places such as Japan, where the introduction of market relations did not require the nation-state to implement arbitrarily any sweeping policy of cultural homogenization “from above” (because the population had already been *organically* homogenized during the previous centuries), not only were traditional relations left practically intact with hardly any erosion of individuality, but they managed to blend smoothly within a new indigenous form of capitalism contributing considerably to the Japanese post-WWII “economic miracle.” Capitalism does tend to flatten all values to the level of mere *exchange* value, precipitating a redistribution of authority and reorganization of power relations according to the logic of the cash nexus, but only within a context pre-homogenized by the nation-state through the prior substitution of a “public sphere” for the informal communal dimension. Such an operation of cultural subversion is usually the work of a modernizing New Class committed to the substitution of formal and abstract discourse (the cultural equivalent of the commodity form: what Gouldner, following Basil Bernstein, called “the elaborate speech code”) for the particular context-dependent discourse typical of everyday community life. Both are necessary for effective participation in postmodern society, but without the formative influence of the community’s “restricted code” the result is the “authoritarian personality” of the 1930s or the clientized populace of today’s welfare state. See Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979).

rigorous theoretical articulation of its fundamental aspirations — but also with the acme of 20th century continental thought: Adorno's critique of identity logic, Husserl's phenomenology and Schmitt's jurisprudence. Although there was never any *direct* relation between the two, in retrospect it is immediately obvious that Dewey's pragmatism and populism have a common origin, a shared tradition and a similar vision. When all is said and done, they turn out to be two sides of the same coin — to the point of succumbing to the same bitter fate. For Dewey, *participatory* democracy was always more than a mere political regime. It was a way of life constitutive of a new personality²⁴ — a kind of personality impossible to nurture within a society which, unlike the sort of communities deemed terminally obsolete since Tönnies' classical account of the irreversible historical trajectory leading from premodern communities to modern societies, emphasizes only what Gouldner called "the Culture of Critical Discourse,"²⁵ leaving it to largely unacknowledged residual traditional structures to constitute a viable individuality.²⁶ Paradoxical as it may appear at first sight, at least to the extent that Schmitt, Adorno and Husserl never had anything to do with American populism nor were they at all familiar with its history, their

24. According to Westbrook, "The central political imperative for Dewey was to develop a society that provided the conditions for growth through participation in community life, participation he believed essential to self-realization." See Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 546.

25. Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals . . .*, *op. cit.*, pp. 48ff. Gouldner's penetrating account, however, ends up vitiated by his lingering Weberianism and his obsession with Marxism. By splitting the New Class into "intellectuals" and the "intelligentsia," "old line bureaucrats" and "new staff intelligentsia," etc., he ends up obscuring the main political issues. The postmodern acknowledgment of the inescapable circularity of all discourses, critical or otherwise, renders the "critical" component of New Class ideology Gouldner admired irrelevant and devoid of whatever emancipatory value he, still embroiled in Enlightenment pseudo-universalism, sought to vindicate in it. For a prefiguration of postmodern alternatives, see Renato Parascandalo and Vittorio Hösle, "Three Interviews with Paul K. Feyerabend," in *Telos* 102 (Winter 1995), pp. 115-148.

26. In *The Public and its Problems*, (Athens: The Ohio University Press, 1991), pp. 158-161, Dewey readily admitted that "knowledge is a function of association and communication; it depends upon tradition, upon tools and methods socially transmitted and sanctioned"; and that "habits are formed for the most part under the influence of the customs of a group." This is not a mere afterthought, as he makes clear when he adds: "The influence of habits is decisive because all distinctively human action has to be learned, and the very heart, blood and sinews of learning is creation of habitudes." This grounding of individuality within the concrete community framework was nothing radically new, but the very basis of the predominant 18th century American ethos, responsible for the kind of peculiar political institutions that did develop after the revolution. See Barry Alan Shain, *The Myth of American Individualism: The Protestant Origins of American Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

works actually address a number of crucial issues which either remained underdeveloped in Dewey's late works or else were summarily short-circuited by his students — a group terminally engaged in the professionalization and scientization of philosophy in the US after WWII, and uninterested in developing a political analysis extending much beyond the immediate concerns of those days: anti-communism and state interventionism.

Adorno's critique of identity logic generalizes Dewey's theory of experience into a socio-political indictment of late modernity impossible to reconcile with its early rationalist objectives; Husserl's analysis of the crisis of European sciences vindicates a teleological dimension which, while animating Dewey's outlook throughout his life, first remained largely buried in his early works and then was eventually forgotten by his students; and Schmitt's reconstruction of the rise and decline of the sovereign state as part and parcel of the *jus publicum Europaeum* provides the concrete historical content to a political philosophy which in Dewey remained rather abstract and, consequently, unable to provide any viable alternative to the cultural hegemony of the technocratic ideology structuring and directing New Deal policies at the time. It is not an accident, therefore, that both in popular consciousness and in academic conventional wisdom, Dewey's legacy never really succeeded in dissociating itself from the predominant ideology of the 1930s and 1940s — no matter how radically different it turns out to be on closer scrutiny. Precisely because of these shortcomings, Adorno, Husserl and Schmitt provide the kind of theoretical refinements that bring out most prominently the true populist character of American pragmatism before it became professionalized into another garden variety of technocratic ideology first and an American home-grown equivalent of French poststructuralism later.²⁷

Although "Dewey was the only progressive to survive the 1920s with his democratic faith intact,"²⁸ toward the end of his life, when he was confronted with the deployment of the New Deal and the threat its social engineering posed to his brand of democracy, his theoretical toolbox proved inadequate to construct a politically viable alternative vision

27. See John Patrick Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

28. James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 394. Diggins goes even further in ascribing to Dewey the "hope that the modern state could somehow inculcate citizen participation by invoking older community values once found in face-to-face relations," in *op. cit.*, p. 339. But in Dewey's original model of participatory democracy the state cannot undertake any administrative proselytization, much less "inculcate" anything, without contradicting the fundamental democratic principle of self-determination.

or even to reconstruct the one he had grown up with. Guinlock and other contemporary Deweyans are correct in emphasizing that Dewey is "perhaps the greatest critic of the Enlightenment concept of reason,"²⁹ but they fail to emphasize the extent to which his commitment to the emancipatory role of social science was not only a throw-back to the kind of idealist claims to absolute truth he otherwise rejected, but also contradicted his constant emphasis on the terminally contextual (i.e., community-based) character of *all* knowledge. It is not surprising, therefore, that half a century after his death social thought in the US is still dominated by the abstract Enlightenment ideology of, e.g., John Rawls and Robert Nozick — paradigmatic antithetical expressions of the kind of welfare state Dewey's instrumentalism should have fought from the very beginning, when it began to assert itself as "social science."³⁰ Thus his critique of "the naturalistic fallacy," i.e., the confusion of the multifaceted character of natural entities with the necessarily limited conceptual representations meant to apprehend them, was not sufficiently broad to provide the kind of indictment of managerial ideology as, e.g., Adorno's "critique of identity logic,"³¹ according to which bureaucratic central

29. James Guinlock, "Introduction" to Jo Ann Boydston, ed., *John Dewey. The Later Works, 1925-1953*, Vol. 2 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), p. xxiv.

30. Guinlock bemoans this state of affairs, but fails to indicate the extent to which it is a result of Dewey's confused concept of the public, the inability to contextualize it within both a *communitarian* and a *federal* context, and an altogether unwarranted faith in the emancipatory role of that "social science" which already in the 1930s was well on the way to becoming New Class ideology *par excellence*. See Guinlock, *op. cit.*, pp. xxxv-xxxvi. For a devastating critique of social science, see Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, *op. cit.* pp. 424ff. For all his penetrating insights, however, Lasch himself remains mesmerized by the same *nationalist* chimera that ultimately led Dewey's original dream of "The Great Community" to deteriorate into another *de facto* garden variety of the welfare state. Consequently, to the extent that he does not remain focused on the local, face-to-face dimension of community interaction (impossible to extrapolate, without translating it into representative democracy, on a national level necessarily under the sway of New Class hegemony), Lasch's populist vision remains a utopian ideal susceptible, as in the past, to "progressive" New Class instrumentalizations.

31. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, tr. by E. B. Ashton (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973). A politically effective critique of identity logic, however, must vindicate the experiential primacy of that preconceptual dimension Adorno never felt comfortable with since, along with most intellectuals of his generation, he also associated it with irrational impulses and, therefore, Nazi and fascist problematics. This is why his original critique of identity logic needs to be buttressed by the kind of phenomenological foundation he never quite understood. See Enzo Paci, *The Function of the Sciences and the Meaning of Man*, tr. by Paul Piccone and James E. Hansen (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972); and Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, tr. by David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

planning turns out to be doomed to failure *in principle*, and to generate innumerable unintended consequences as a result of the inherent inadequacy of the concept (rather than because of poor implementations of the plan, as is usually claimed by practically every inept New Class planner or communist *apparatchik*). Similarly, Dewey's epistemology was never fully integrated with his views concerning the pedagogical function of participatory democracy. Consequently, he never succeeded in identifying the social conditions conducive to the constitution of a *concrete* public of autonomous individuals interacting on more than merely the abstract conceptual level privileged by New Class intellectuals. Here is where Husserl's *Lebenswelt* as a precategorical dimension essential for the transmission of what is not or cannot be captured by the concept alone and, consequently, the vindication of the primacy of the micrological context for the constitution of a democratic personality helps formulate a critique of the *mass* democracy ushered in by the New Deal as fundamentally undemocratic and as an exercise in demagoguery — even though Dewey's constant emphasis on the experiential dimension sought to privilege precisely the primacy of communal life. Thus Dewey never developed a satisfactory analysis of how the preconditions for democratic participation (such as autonomous individuality) were being eroded by bureaucratization, centralization, the professionalization of politics and the resulting exclusion of the overwhelming majority of the people increasingly incapable of engaging in that particular type of discourse.³² Last, but not least, his concept of politics in general and the state in particular were never historicized, contextualized or deconstructed as, e.g., in Schmitt's trenchant critique of Hans Kelsen and the reconstruction of the trajectory of the *jus publicum Europaeum*, to generate a substantive analysis of the statist subversion of the US Constitution taking place under his very eyes through a series of subtle Supreme Court decisions reinterpreting the meaning of the 10th and 14th amendments.

32. Although Dewey was well aware of the dangers of the development of a ruling intellectual aristocracy, he assumed that democratic control would prevent that and keep experts and professionals within the framework of a democratic society predicated on the primacy of community. He never tired of pointing out that "The Great Society created by steam and electricity may be a society, but is no community." Dewey, *op. cit.* p. 98. Since he died long before the debilitating impact of the welfare state in clientizing the beneficiaries of its services became obvious, he did not confront the problem of the New Class mediatizing democratic consensus and therefore turning the democratic process into an exercise in the legitimation of New Class domination. *Ibid.*, pp. 208ff.

While he never forgot the Jeffersonian ideals of his youth,³³ nor that small self-governing communities were "the heart of his philosophy of politics," there is hardly a word in Dewey's voluminous writings about the specific historical motives behind the original model of American self-government and federalism as radical alternatives to either the nation-state or the centralized mega-states developing at the time.³⁴ Although the growing problems of a capitalist economy, the rise of fascism and communism, and the gradual involution of liberalism into a technocratic, managerial ideology did not provide the best context within which to recycle Jeffersonianism *sic et nunc* in the heyday of Fordism, there were other dissenting voices³⁵ and potentially retrievable models he could have appropriated, even if they were associated with the conservative mind-set of people such as the Southern Agrarians, still engaged in fighting long lost battles or trying to hang on to a past that could only survive by reconstituting itself as the future.

33. It is not mere coincidence that as late as 1939 Dewey edited a volume of Jefferson's writings. See Westbrook, *op. cit.* pp. 454-55.

34. In tracing the development of American political institutions, Dewey does not realize that his insistence on the primacy of community and of the face-to-face interaction that characterizes it requires the kind of jurisdictional autonomy impossible within "the Great Community" he hoped the US would become. Consequently, he saw federalism as essentially another version of the nation-state. See Dewey, *op. cit.*, pp. 112ff., 225, and Chapter V "Search for the Great Community," pp. 143-184. He assumed that such a community "will have its consummation when free inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication." To the extent that this type of communication is restricted to that "culture of critical discourse" beyond the reach of most ordinary people thereby excluded from democratic participation, it subverts the possibility of realizing precisely that democratic ideal Dewey thought it would.

35. While the Southern Agrarians in the 1930s shared Dewey's enthusiasm for some version of Jeffersonianism and advocated a robust criticism of the burgeoning welfare state from a regionalist perspective — a criticism which today sounds a lot more relevant than Dewey's own modulated reservations — there was never a possibility of conceptual cross-fertilization. Not only were the Southern Agrarians terminally *premodern* and embroiled with some of the more questionable features of "the traditional Southern way of life" (something anathema to Dewey), but they could never have bought into Dewey's fascination with science, experimentation and, most of all, his profound democratic creed. Paradoxically, insightful as the Southern Agrarians' critique might have been, it was precisely this set of values which prevented Dewey from taking that critique seriously. The Southern Agrarians' insistence on *local* autonomy could have provided some theoretical muscle to Dewey's unresolved thematization of the welfare state and New Class centralization. In the few references in his works to the Southern doctrine of state's rights and local autonomy, Dewey ridicules it as provincial and often *de facto* self-contradictory. See Dewey, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-133. For a typical Southern Agrarian critique, see Donald Davidson, *Regionalism and Nationalism in the United States: The Attack on Leviathan*, with a new introduction by Russell Kirk (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991).

As a result, Dewey's heritage suffered exactly the same fate as populism. As the latter faded into progressivism, his philosophy ended up forgotten or distorted into merely another variant of the predominant scientistic ideology throughout the leaden years of the Cold War. As one of his more perceptive biographers put it, already by the end of WWII "both among philosophers and in the larger society, he had become a figure widely honored and broadly ignored."³⁶ Even his more successful "heir," Richard Rorty, has little in common with Dewey's concerns for participatory democracy, meaningful education and a concept of citizenship constitutive of a new personality type. As has been pointed out, "Rorty wanted to see America choose tradition rather than moral law, the conventions of an ongoing community rather than the general principles of a static theory."³⁷ Yet the traditions his philosophy articulate are not organically grounded anywhere other than in Rorty's own professional community and are predicated on the kind of opportunism, irresponsibility and shifting conformism typical of *fin-de-siècle* academia.³⁸ With the end of the Cold War and the growing legitimation deficit of the central government, however, Dewey's political philosophy becomes increasingly relevant, along with that postmodern populism which, when all is said and done, should have been its *realpolitische* otherness all along.

The reasons for this state of affairs are not difficult to fathom. While Dewey's philosophy has from the very beginning been associated by its critics with opportunism, mere problem-solving and a distrust of all received views, it was actually deeply rooted in that same *traditional* American framework that gave rise to populism. With the development of industrialism, the closing of the Western frontier, the assimilation of a heterogeneous lot of predominantly East and South European immigrants and the gradual rise of the US to a world power, the original organic bonds between the WASP polity and the federal institutional forms it had generated could no longer be maintained. What displaced them after the Civil War resulted in the obliteration of the last main premodern obstacle, Southern particularism, thus paving the way for the construction of a homogenizing nation-state predicated on a modernist and progressive framework allegedly free of all theological and axiological foundations.³⁹

36. Westbrook, *op. cit.*, p. 532.

37. Diggins, *op. cit.*, p. 452.

38. Westbrook seconds widespread evaluations of Rorty's neo-pragmatism as a "cultural criticism that flies entirely by the seat of its pants." See Westbrook, *op. cit.*, p. 540.

39. See Richard Bense, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

This type of totalizing political organization gradually eroded previous informal internal control mechanisms, resulting in the long series of social dislocations culminating in the Great Depression and a new mediational institution (an all-powerful interventionist federal government) meant to substitute for the long gone organic bonds. Such a culture not only marginalized local community infrastructure indispensable for the kind of *Bildung* Dewey considered an indispensable component of democracy, but generated a society polarized into governing elites and a broader polity for whom democracy was reduced to "a measure of influence without any direct participation in policy making and usually without even any direct communication with policy makers."⁴⁰ This mass society, however, had little in common with the original model of American democracy, least of all with the democratic ethos Dewey strove to vindicate. Thus, in many respects, Dewey's and the populists' democratic ideals were already becoming a memory when they were first articulated and did not have much of a chance to become reinstitutionalized unless the conditions responsible for their obsolescence did not themselves become obsolete with the decline of modernity and Fordism. The advent of postmodernity and post-Fordism may have created those new social conditions conducive to the revitalization of Deweyan and populist ideals — ideals which can no longer be relegated to 19th century nostalgia by appealing to discredited theories of progress.

Toward the end of his life, Dewey became too embroiled with the predominant modernist assumptions of his day to be interested in reinventing a capitalism different from the rapacious corporate variety that had developed by the 1920s and 1930s — one based on the populist ideal of small entrepreneurship, hard work and personal responsibility (although such an ideal was certainly in tune both with his New England background and his Protestant upbringing). Thus, despite the fact he initially privileged participatory democratic communities as prior to a central state seen basically as a mediating agency, and despite his life-long admiration for Jefferson's political philosophy, in the wake of the Great Depression he did unwittingly succumb to the sirens of technocracy and scientism. This was in no small part due to his undifferentiated concept of an amorphous public totalized by the new modes of communication and interaction. Dewey had too much faith in the emancipatory role of the social sciences, deemed objective and neutral, to inquire into the extent to which such sciences

40. Westbrook, *op. cit.*, p. 544. See also Klappenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.

were well on the way to becoming the far-from-neutral arm of the developing New Deal bureaucratic apparatus needed to mediatize what is still referred to as "informed publics" or "the public sphere."⁴¹ Generalized to the *national* level, the mediatized public loses whatever pedagogical role it may have played when limited to communities characterized by the primacy of face-to-face interaction. There is no attempt in Dewey to thematize the primacy of a community-based public within a broader context by inquiring into new federal modes of governance — something already prefigured in the Jeffersonian model he greatly admired. Consequently, public discourse evaporates into the ethereal domain of technocratic management and not only loses its original emancipatory function but becomes a new sophisticated tool of legitimation for hegemonic New Class elites. To the extent that access to the kind of abstract critical discourse facilitated by the new communication technology turned out to be restricted primarily to these New Class elites, his fascination with science led him unavoidably to prefigure an idiosyncratic version of the predominant technocratic ideology. In times of crisis, he saw the common good as served best by an interventionist state able to deploy whatever measures the situation demands.⁴² It is not surprising that his views, notwithstanding lame attempts to distinguish between (democratic) *planning* and the (bureaucratic) *planned*, fed into and became identified with, rather than constituting an alternative to, technocratic New Deal liberalism and the predominant progressivism. While a postmodern populism shares the spirit and thrust of Dewey's philosophy, it also needs a considerably more articulate political theory able to thematize the social roots of the new conflicts dividing the public into populists and New Class agents in order to prefigure the kind of institutional framework necessary to guarantee the permanence of participatory democratic practices.

Populist Geopolitics? Schmitt and Populism

A more elaborate *political* theory must begin by historicizing the

41. Although in the lectures he delivered in China he advocated a traditionally American concept of the state as a minimalist institution meant to facilitate interaction among a variety of social groups, Dewey eventually broadened his position to accommodate social engineering. Confronted with the need to contain the havoc wrought by capitalism (i.e., the Depression), he grudgingly gravitated to a more interventionist concept — notwithstanding the fact that he was always adamantly opposed to state capitalism and any form of authoritarian socialism. For Dewey's early views, see Robert W. Clopton and Tsuin-chen, eds., *John Dewey: Lectures in China, 1919-1920* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1973).

42. See Westbrook, *op. cit.*, pp. 305ff.

sovereign state as a particular historical formation within a specific geographical context. According to Schmitt, this state was the highest achievement of Western rationalism and the main agency of secularization in Europe. It also was the foundation of that *jus publicum Europaeum* codified in international law at least until challenged by the Monroe Doctrine and the US rise as a continental power.⁴³ By the end of the 19th century, when the US had grown into a major world power, the sovereign European state was already in decline. The end of the epoch it defined was delayed by the advent of communism and eventually the Cold War. In spite of the creation of the UN, the resulting post-WWII bipolar world system further contributed to the weakening of state sovereignty, but also helped to perpetuate the fiction of the state as the fundamental political unit. Only after the disappearance of the Soviet Union did it become obvious that the state had lost (or was in the process of rapidly losing) its legitimacy. Despite all the recent speculations about various potential "New World Orders," no such system has developed, nor has any new political form yet effectively challenged the moribund traditional sovereign state.

Already in the late 1930s, Schmitt theorized the development of a new world order as a global cluster of regional political formations (*Grossräume*) predicated on the hegemony of a major power over a plethora of surrounding states⁴⁴ — something not altogether different from the system of "spheres of influence" which developed after the WWII. This scenario, however, is not the *only* one Schmitt provides. His focus on geopolitical *Realpolitik* was a special instance of his constant emphasis on what particular interests were hidden behind ideological mystifications as well as their historical trajectory. This is why he was so critical of liberalism and that pseudo-universalism deployed by Enlightenment ideologues in the 18th century to justify the homogenizing role of the Jacobin state and French expansionist ambitions. Unlike the Marxist critique of the bourgeois domination ushered in by the French Revolution, Schmitt's own analysis did not theorize the remedy for bourgeois pseudo-universality in terms of the advent of genuine universality through an extension of political rationalization in the economic sphere. Rather, through a critique much more radical than the Marxist and free of unwarranted teleological baggage such as the Enlightenment theory of

43. See G.L. Ulmen, "American Imperialism and International Law: Carl Schmitt on the US in World Affairs," in *Telos* 72 (Summer 1987).

44. Carl Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum* (1950), second edition (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1974).

progress, he traced the foundations of political organization not to the abstract ideals of "*liberté, égalité et fraternité*" but to concrete social forms (Hegel's objective spirit) constituting social consciousness.⁴⁵

The kernel of Schmitt's critique of the French Revolution in particular and, *ipso facto*, of liberal-democratic regimes in general is that, notwithstanding their revolutionary pretenses, revolutionary political regimes can ultimately legitimate their radical break with the existing order only by going back to deeper roots, i.e., by appealing to hidden or forgotten higher mandates, either corrupted or betrayed by the particular orders the revolution seeks to displace. This is why one of the main concerns of Schmitt's jurisprudence became to show the extent to which any new order is necessarily parasitic on the existing one in particular and the tradition in general. In 1934, in what probably constitutes an attempt to implicitly apply this approach to what he mistakenly hoped the newly-established Nazi regime would become, Schmitt was more explicit in demonstrating how, of the three main types of juridical thought — normativism, decisionism and *Ordnungsdenken* — *Ordnungsdenken* is the most fundamental of the three since it is presupposed by the other two. The same applies to political regimes, since according to Schmitt, they are ultimately isomorphic with and objective extensions of juridical systems.⁴⁶ In other words, institutions, traditions and customs are ultimately the inescapable reference points for all types of juridical systems and political regimes. Consequently, what remains decisive, even during the most revolutionary transformations, is

45. The young Marx of the 1844 *Manuscripts* did not fall into the vulgar materialist trap of postulating "consciousness" as a function of "being," the standard Diamat position, but qualified both terms, respectively as "*social being*" and "*social consciousness*." Consequently, Marx's own material base is already Hegel's "objective spirit" rather than a vacuous and meaningless "being as such," which could be dynamicized by subsequent vulgar Marxists only by interjecting illegitimate enthymemes such as secularized equivalents of Christian eschatology. In this sense, the young Marx is much closer to Schmitt's *Ordnungsdenken* than to orthodox Marxism or even to some of his later writings where the economic logic seems to determine political developments.

46. See Carl Schmitt, *Über die drei Arten des rechtswissenschaftlichen Denkens* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1934). According to Portinato: "While for many years Carl Schmitt's name has remained tied to the fortunes or misfortunes of decisionism, such a doctrinal elaboration does not constitute his last word on the subject. Aware of the difficulty and the limitations of such a doctrine, in the 1930s he broached the doctrine of the institution in order to end up later with the theory of *nomos*, while never rejecting his earlier positions. Thus in *Über die drei Arten des rechtswissenschaftlichen Denkens* his recourse to the concept of concrete ordering already sought to integrate decisionism, inadequate from the viewpoint of a theory of ordering, not any less than the normativism of which it constituted the radical reversal and the polemical antithesis." See Pier Paolo Portinato, *La Crisi dello Jus Publicum Europaeum: Saggio su Carl Schmitt* (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1982), p. 93.

precisely that *particular concrete traditional dimension* which in the US has historically been vindicated by populism, against opportunistic departures motivated primarily by the super-legal objectives of the moment.⁴⁷ Within such a framework, populism turns out to be potentially grounded on a very rich and long-standing theoretical tradition. Unfortunately, within a context characterized by New Class cultural hegemony and a dearth of serious populist intellectuals, this wealth so far has remained hidden and unexamined.

Ultimately, all revolutions legitimate themselves by recourse to an older order, reconstituted in terms of present needs and regarded as more legitimate than the present one they seek to overthrow. Thus the French Revolution sought to legitimate itself by appealing to the inalienable rights of man, the Russian one to inevitable progress, National Socialism to racial purity and fascism to an unfulfilled national unity. None of these *ideologies*, however, were actually based on *concrete orders* embodying the spatio-temporal particularity of the people they pretended to totalize into a political unit, but rather, on mere *normative* frameworks, i.e., abstract constructs created by various groups of New Class ideologists meant to legitimate new *modernist* relations of domination.⁴⁸ Consequently, while pretending to represent particular populist sensibilities,⁴⁹ they all ended up

47. For a critical discussion of "super-legality," see Paul Piccone and Gary Ulmen, "Schmitt's 'Testament' and the Future of Europe," in *Telos* 83 (Spring 1990), pp. 3-34.

48. As Schmitt put it, "the subjugation of the state to ethical norms means nothing other than the control and domination of certain men and social groups which, in fact, achieve control of the state in the name of ethical norms they have made valid." Carl Schmitt, "Staatethik und pluralistischer Staat," in *Positionen und Begriff im Kampf Weimar-Genf-Versailles, 1923-1939* (Hamburg: Haseatische Verlaganstalt, 1940), p. 144. Far from appealing to any *concrete* traditional orders, such as those obtaining in Bavaria or Prussia, Nazism resorted to a mixture of myth and modernism, thus betraying its fundamental New Class character. See Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Similarly, Italian fascism did not pay any attention to the particular concrete orders of the various Italian regions but sought to homogenize them all by appealing to the long defunct legacy of the Roman Empire — a legacy which, because of the lingering influence of Roman law, may apply to European rather than merely Italian identity.

49. As Miglio has indicated, under mostly Marxist (and, therefore, paradigmatically New Class) influences, the history of the last couple of centuries has been interpreted primarily in terms of the logic of *capitalist* expansion, ignoring altogether a parallel and even more important mode of domination articulated through *political* power relations. The latter have been institutionalized through the development of nation-states originally deployed to re-establish order during the religious civil wars in the 17th century but later, after the French Revolution, to redefine concrete traditional orders of particular peoples in terms of the abstract Enlightenment ideology of the rising New Class. See Gianfranco Miglio, *Una Costituzione per i Prossimi Trent'Anni. Intervista sulla Terza Repubblica*, ed. by Marcello Staglieno (Bari: Laterza, 1990); and "Toward a Federal Italy," in *Telos* 90 (Winter 1991-92), pp. 19-42.

instrumentalizing them within their own *nationalist* programs of indiscriminately homogenizing a plethora of particular peoples into "nations."

No longer able to derive its legitimation by traditional means, the nation-state had to find recourse to formal ones such as legality, but also nationalism, solidarity, etc. The latter could only go so far: ultimately the only effective mode of legitimation was the guarantee of collective well-being through the development of expansive and wasteful welfare states financed largely through deficit spending justified by emergency predicaments such as the Great Depression and the Cold War. Thus the end of the Cold War not only means the dissolution of the two blocs, but also the exhaustion of whatever remains of the legitimating mechanisms of sovereign nation-states, now too small to deal with the debilitating impact of economic and cultural globalization and too large to handle growing domestic problems. Populism and federalism resurface at this juncture as concrete alternatives to domestic disintegration and international chaos. This is the predicament which has led to the projection of European unification and increasing calls for decentralization, regionalization and localization within the particular nations engaged in the still ambiguous and confused undertaking.

It is also the predicament of the US, where the original federal and populist foundations have been eroded by two centuries of nation-building — an erosion resulting from unresolved contradictions built in the very constitutional framework.⁵⁰ The American Revolution began with a Declaration of Independence predicated on the same universal human rights as its French counterpart later on (something that never found its way into the subsequent Constitution), but ultimately concerned, first and foremost, with the sovereignty and axiological heterogeneity of the particular states coming together as a federation. This conflictual legitimating foundation, implicit in

50. Contrary to nationalist neo-conservative arguments, such as those of, e.g., Samuel H. Beer, to the effect that the federation is *prior* to the states and only subsequently legitimates them as relatively autonomous units, the states constitute the fundamental units legitimating and empowering the federation — even if some states came into being as a result of federal efforts. The structure of the Constitution is such that the states cannot be coherently degraded, as has happened since, to the level of mere administrative units of an otherwise unitary central government. See Samuel H. Beer, *To Make a Nation: the Rediscovery of American Federalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). The oxymoronic title already betrays the main thesis. Theoretical sloppiness about fundamental concepts such as "nation" and "federation" occludes the conformist intent to legitimate the involution of the federal system into a *de facto* national one. The unitary character of the nation is incompatible with the heterogeneity of the federation. Turning a federation into a nation requires substantial constitutional modifications, which cannot (and should not) be smuggled in, as has happened in the US, through the hermeneutical legendermain of various "activist" Supreme Courts and the questionable legitimating historiography of apologetic academics.

the motto "*e pluribus unum*," was initially resolved with the Civil War in favor of the "*unum*" without, however, ever entirely vanquishing the "*pluribus*." The latter captures and provides the proper institutional framework for the particular participatory character of American democracy much more than the former, derived directly from 18th century Enlightenment universalism and originally deployed primarily to protect the country from the lingering threats of European powers and to facilitate internal development.

Because of historically specific reasons having to do mostly with the political system's relative openness and the lack of an oppressive past, American populism always felt at ease within the general constitutional framework — unlike other *premodern* countries, such as Russia, where precisely the opposite was the case and the predominant authoritarian context accounts for the equally authoritarian and violent character of the kind of native populism that developed there during the latter part of the 19th century.⁵¹ Consequently, American populism was always *reformist*. Whatever authoritarianism there was within its ranks was primarily a matter of personal idiosyncrasies. In most *modern* and *post-modern* contexts,⁵² where democratic traditions and parliamentary systems are well established there are usually sufficient institutional means to resolve internal conflicts and, consequently, contain any transition — even those hitherto regarded as "revolutionary" — within the confines of strict legality (that was what happened with Nazism, and was also the main premise of the Eurocommunist strategy deployed in the 1970s).

While the roots of American populism can be readily traced to the

51. See Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution. A History of the Populist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia* (London: Weinfeld and Nicholson, 1960). See also Piccone, "The Crisis of Liberalism . . .," *op. cit.*, p. 23n.

52. As Schmitt emphasized in the very last article he wrote, the contemporary structure of the liberal democratic state renders unnecessary the kind of extra-legal politics historically associated with both Right and Left manifestations of the populist phenomenon. In fact, he saw this openness as a potential problem, which he thought ought to be remedied with the deployment of "super-legality" (provisions making it difficult to alter fundamental constitutional rules similar to those already built in the US Constitution). See Carl Schmitt, "The Legal World Revolution," in *Telos* 72 (Summer 1987), pp. 73-89. While aimed specifically at Eurocommunist strategies to gain power through electoral means, this is the very same argument Schmitt had deployed in the 1920s and 1930s. In fact, from the very inception of the Weimar Constitution — a constitution he was not particularly fond of — Schmitt emphasized the centrality of Article 48 empowering the Chancellor to prevent a too facile revolutionary alteration of the constitutional order. See Carl Schmitt, *Der Hüter der Verfassung*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1969).

18th century, to the pre-revolutionary colonial experience, Protestant theology and the vindication of religious particularity, a roughly similar process can be located in European history. The different socio-historical context within which it came into being, however, resulted in rather different political manifestations and different misinterpretations by New Class historiography. Ironically, Schmitt himself, never a populist in any sense of the word, also provides the basis for a reconstruction of the dynamics of the figure of the "populist" in terms of the historical trajectory of its prototype, "the partisan." In documenting the trajectory of this usually unexamined political figure, he traces the concept of the "partisan" back to the Spanish and Prussian anti-Napoleonic struggles of 1808-1813, culminating in the Spanish *Reglamento de Partidas y Cuadrillas* of December 28, 1808 and the Prussian *Landstrum* of April 21, 1813.⁵³ Contrary to Left conventional wisdom that identifies the partisan *sic et nunc* with the anti-fascist resistance during the closing phases of WWII, the original partisans were engaged in defending their particular communities against the abstract universalism of an Enlightenment imposed throughout Europe by Napoleon and French imperialism — the same sort of abstract universalism subsequently upgraded and recycled by the communists in a new world-historical struggle for "human emancipation," i.e., the homogenization of all particularity and difference under the stewardship of enlightened party intellectuals.

In the 20th century, however, the partisans were successfully instrumentalized by Leninism as the shock-troops of precisely that universalism the original partisans had fought against. Communist partisans presented themselves as the defenders of their homes and families against foreign invaders or colonial occupation, but they no longer fought for the particularity, specificity and otherness of their communities but for universal goals articulated by the local branch of the Communist Party. As Julian Freund has indicated, the partisan struggling for the universalistic goals of communism is not really a "partisan" but a "guerrilla,"⁵⁴ and the preconditions for his existence are strictly limited to the history of world communism (1917-1989). At that point, however, "politics . . . centers on [abstract] values and no longer on the definable

53. Carl Schmitt, *Theorie des Partisanen. Zwischenbemerkung zum Begriff des Politischen* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1970).

54. Cf. Julian Freund, *Utopie et Violence* (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1978). Cf. also Gary Ulmen, "Reflections of a Partisan: Julien Freund (1921-1993)," in *Telos* 102 (Winter 1995), pp. 3-10.

interests of established communities."⁵⁵

Schmitt, of course, was primarily concerned with the changing character of war, when the concept of the "enemy" typical of the *jus publicum Europaeum* became displaced by the "foe"⁵⁶ of total war, thus paving the way for wars of extermination and the kind of barbarity typical of the 20th century.⁵⁷ His emphasis on the partisan as an irregular combattant was primarily meant to exemplify the extent to which the distinction between war and peace had become blurred in a political setting he feared would gradually deteriorate into a universal civil war. Yet he continued to vindicate the "telluric" character of the partisan, his commitment to the particularity of his community, its traditions and customs. Similarly, while not altogether sure about what form the new *nomos* of the earth would take,⁵⁸ in the closing page of his book he hints at the possibility of "unexpected forms of a new partisan" as the political figure of the future.

Schmitt never went as far as to identify this "new partisan" with "the postmodern populist." He was too concerned with the communists' instrumentalization of the partisan as an irregular fighter in a global confronta-

55. See Paul Gottfried, *Carl Schmitt: Politics and Theory* (New York: Greenwood, 1990), p. 89. Gottfried, however, is unable to see any alternatives to the state and, consequently, sees its erosion as a symptom of decadence and decline. He remains too tied to a unilinear theory of history to envision the possibility of qualitatively new modes of political organization beyond the nation-state. Consequently, he ends up dismissing the partisan-turned-guerrilla as irreversibly corrupted by the Marxist instrumentalization and cannot envision any possible retrieval of the original particularity and "telluric character" constituting its original *raison d'être*.

56. See G. L. Ulmen, "Return of the Foe," and George Schwab, "Enemy or Foe: A Conflict of Modern Politics," both in *Telos* 72 (Summer 1987), pp. 187-193 and 194-201.

57. Interestingly enough, Dewey was also bothered by this transformation and actually complained that the Great War and "the dynastic conflicts of the seventeenth century" are both called "wars." See Dewey, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

58. Schmitt, *Theorie des Partisanen*, *op. cit.* Already in 1951, in *La Unidad del Mundo* (Madrid: Ateneo, 1951), Schmitt speculated as to the kind of "New World Order" which may follow the Cold War and argued against the possibility of a unified world. At that time he spoke of "a new plurality," but one which he feared would be "frought with catastrophies." Ten years later, however, he was already envisioning more positive possibilities — projections increasingly closer to the populist vision that eventually transpires in *Theorie des Partisanen*. In discussing the kind of *Grossräume* that would develop following the end of the Cold War, as well as the type of peoples constituting them, he wrote: "It will become clear then which nations and which peoples will have had sufficient strength to maintain themselves through industrial development and be faithful to themselves . . . It will be clear then that the new spaces receive a content not only from technology, but also from the spiritual substance of the men who collaborate in their development, from their religion and their race, from their culture, their language and from the living force of their national heritage." See Carl Schmitt, *El Orden del Mundo Después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial* (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Politicos, 1962).

tion between two implacably opposed *Grossräume* to realize the extent to which this instrumentalization was inherently unstable and had already become obsolete by the 1950s.⁵⁹ The identification of the *particular* objectives of "national liberation movements" with the *universalization* of the communist system could make sense only within the context of the world revolution the USSR had *de facto* already postponed indefinitely with Stalin's strategy of "socialism in one country" and *de jure* repudiated at the end of WWII with the abolition of the Comintern. The Yugoslav defection from the communist camp and the beginning of the Sino-Soviet split in the late 1950s had already resulted in a deterioration of relations between the Soviet Union, still presenting itself as the universal agent of world communism, and the various liberation movements allegedly furthering the cause in their particular national contexts. It was becoming increasingly obvious that the USSR merely instrumentalized these movements to further its otherwise rather particularistic geopolitical objectives, while the various liberation movements mostly reciprocated by paying lip service to communist ideology in order to receive economic and military assistance in overthrowing established local power structures.

Schmitt saw the partisan as part of a *premodern* reaction against the French revolution and its imperialist Enlightenment ideology, defending particularity against an extraneous homogenizing universality. In a *modernist* context identifying particularity and universality *tout court*, the partisan turned into the guerrilla seeking to defend particularity by fighting for universality. With the advent of postmodernity, the figure of the partisan evolves once again into the new populist concerned with vindicating his own particularity against the clientizing and marginalizing pseudo-universality of the New Class, now identified in the US with the "federal" government. Confused and misguided as they may be, the various local

59. To the extent that he was concerned primarily with European history, Schmitt overlooked the fact that his figure of the "modern" partisan can be traced beyond the anti-Napoleonic and anti-Enlightenment struggles of the early 19th century. The first modern partisans were actually the minutemen of the American Revolution. Unlike their later European counterparts, they were not struggling merely for local autonomy, tradition and customs, i.e., for a pre-modern *status quo ante*, against what later came to be called "modernity." Rather, they sought the political equivalent of the objectification of a Protestant ethos which, although pretending to vindicate that authentic Christianity obtaining prior to its corruption by the Catholic Church, prefigured the development of a new society unencumbered by European domination. Thus, unlike their European counterparts later on, they were under no pressure to reconstitute their communities as political organizations structurally isomorphic with the nascent French *nation-state* they opposed, which explains why they were free to develop a *federal* system more adequate to safeguard their particularity and otherness.

militia and separatist movements springing up throughout the US in reaction to a central government perceived as intrusive, foreign and tendentially totalitarian are pathological symptoms of the new postmodern political predicament. Similarly, the various regionalist and secessionist movements springing up throughout Europe and seeking to bypass the nation in favor of a more autonomous relation with a united Europe, are part of the same general crisis of ungovernability resulting from legalitarianism and motorized legislation — the inevitable outcome of the pretense of formalizing and codifying all social practices in a heterogeneous context no longer characterized by shared mores and traditional modes of interaction. This Enlightenment *hubris* of pretending to be able to capture in thought and regulate all that obtains in life gives rise to an unending stream of legislation which eventually renders the system a lawyers' heaven and everyone else's hell. The tendency is for the system to become caught in a vicious system whereby the more legislation is passed the more unwieldy the system becomes.⁶⁰ The unintended consequence of this rationality deficit is the deployment of ever greater amounts of *corruption* necessary to cut through the red tape as compensatory mechanisms, thus triggering even more legislation and regulation to contain it,⁶¹ gradually delegitimizing not only the legal system but also the liberal democratic framework of which it is an inextricable part.

The phenomenon of the Leagues in Italy, the various secessionist movements throughout Europe, the attempt to vindicate the 10th Amendment to the US Constitution against recent interpretations of the 14th, the

60. This Enlightenment tradition is what generated the legal positivism of the 19th century, eventually resulting in the liberal regimes' "legalitarianism" and the kind of "motorized legislation" Schmitt indicted as threatening the eventual disintegration of the legal system. See Carl Schmitt, "The Plight of European Jurisprudence," in *Telos* 83 (Spring 1990), pp. 35-70. The juridical "normativism" typical of New Class rule, however, is self-destructive, leading eventually to a crisis of ungovernability and, therefore, reconstruction of the institutional framework along more manageable lines. Today's confrontation between a populism not yet fully aware of its identity and heritage, and the still hegemonic New Class, is not only the most recent manifestation of what Schmitt described as the conflict between "normativism" and *Ordnungsdenken*, but also a not yet systematically articulated call for institutional alternatives to the increasingly ungovernable framework.

61. For a discussion of the dynamics of administration, see Emery M. Roe, "Critical Theory, Sustainable Development and Populism," in this issue of *Telos*; and *Narrative Policy Analysis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994). While Roe's analysis accurately captures the quandaries of administrative rationality, he tends to frame his account in terms of a cyclic process, which provides the misleading impression that the process takes place within an overall stable context and can go on indefinitely.

US government's new strategy to devolve entitlements (still mystified as part of "human rights") to the states in the form of "bloc grants," the growing interest in "subsidiarity," the Waco affair and the Oklahoma bombing in the US, etc. are all in some sense symptoms of and reactions against this predicament: they all testify to the failure of the New Class to formalize all within a smoothly functioning technocratic apparatus. This is why it is imperative to vindicate the Deweyan legacy within a theoretical context broader than the one he himself provided in order to prefigure a viable strategy to decentralize the federal government, disempower the New Class, and thus vindicate those ideals which in the US are inextricably bound with traditional American identity and throughout most of the world thrive as part of the broader Western heritage.

Democracy vs. Liberalism

The crisis of representative democracy exemplifies the extent to which attempts to solve it by reinvigorating an abstract "public" constituting a national public sphere are doomed to fail, as Dewey's efforts to develop an alternative to the predominant technocratic model in the 1930s in fact did. A populist analysis of this crisis helps explain why it is possible for a "democracy" to have representative institutions such as political parties, voluntary associations, lobbies, etc., and fail – to the point that it becomes necessary for "populist" politicians to attempt to bypass these institutions altogether in order to re-establish that link between rulers and ruled without which "democracy" is meaningless. Impossible to ground in that traditionally democratic face-to-face communication where it is not merely a matter of transmitting conceptually pre-packaged information but of constituting intersubjectivity and social being (i.e., making-something-common), the kind of impoverished political representation provided by representative democracy falls victim to the same unequal exchange which, as Adorno showed, precipitates class divisions and massive social inequalities. Ultimately, when the masses, disenfranchised by this subtle system of political exclusion, are no longer capable of participating in the political process, their withdrawal threatens the vitality of representative democracy itself and facilitates corruption, inefficiency and waste. At any rate, it is a perversion of democratic ideals to continue characterizing as "democratic" a formal electoral process where only a minority of the population bothers to vote in contests where the choices are usually indistinguishable and administratively constituted by political machines, particular economic interests, etc.

For these reasons and others, the dialectic of enlightenment (whereby

enlightenment gradually loses its concrete grounding in the *Lebenswelt* and reverts into precisely the superstition and myth it sought to eliminate) extends to the logic of representative democracy.⁶² Eventually, when it can no longer rely on that minimal direct democracy which, despite all obstacles, still functions as a corrective within a tendentially self-destructive system, representative democracy collapses into "liberal democracy," whereby a growing array of rights and entitlements (presumably meant to protect individuals against the state) ends up restricting real democratic choices to trivialities and transforming the original democratic framework into a new technocratic system of social domination legitimated by a legality predicated on safeguarding the universality of rights and entitlements.⁶³ Here the main political divide obtains no longer between exploiters and exploited, bourgeoisie and proletariat, the owning few and the dispossessed many — the foundation of the traditional Left-Right political paradigm — but between protectors and protected, those who know and those who do not, those who can and do participate and those who cannot and therefore do not.

The resurgence of populist sentiments in the US today reflects widespread uneasiness with this pathological political predicament — one rendered all the more intense by the fact that it has not found a suitable articulation and, consequently, is constantly retranslated in the terms of the old Left-Right paradigm. Thus, when increasingly self-contradictory constructs such as "liberal democracy" are almost universally advertised as the only viable post-1989 political model, "democracy" itself becomes instrumentalized as a legitimating cloak for an otherwise statist version of

62. While the academic industry has canonized this work as a desperate defense of an unfulfilled modernity, its profound critique of representation (the critique of identity logic) prefigures all the main features of a postmodern epistemology. Conformist readings of Adorno as projecting the *fulfillment* rather than the *transcendence* of the Enlightenment project never indulge in concrete elaborations as to what that would actually mean, beyond speculating about abstractions such as "the ideal speech situation." Whatever emancipatory import the Enlightenment may have had, it never had any use for the kind of particularity and otherness — especially the obviously "irrational" type — Adorno had in mind.

63. This is the kind of dialectic Schmitt developed in "Legalität und Legitimität" (1932), in *Verfassungsrechtliche Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1924-1954: Materialien zu einer Verfassungslehre*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1968), pp. 263-345. This technocratic closure of democratic prerogatives is the result of the process of "motorized legislation" Schmitt identified as the logical outcome of that legal positivism institutionalized primarily in Europe, but also elsewhere, in the wake of the French Revolution. It is another version of the same logic which in liberal democracy leads the "liberal" qualifier to eventually overwhelm the "democratic" noun. See Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, tr. by Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

liberal domination.⁶⁴ Within such a context, populism seeks to vindicate the democratic spirit against that liberal statist elitism which has come to characterize the "free world." What generates the paradox of "populism" within allegedly "democratic" societies is nothing but the latest manifestation of the fundamental contradiction between liberalism and democracy.

There is nothing sinister or authoritarian about a *democratic* critique of liberal democracy. In fact, such a critique itself does not fall outside the liberal spectrum — at least to the extent that, within the spectrum of those often contradictory values constituting liberalism, democracy rates as one of the most fundamental values. As a political system predicated on popular sovereignty, "democracy" presupposes the people's absolute freedom as the foundation of all institutions, decisions and other collective objectifications. Although this radical democracy is always framed within a pre-existing social order sedimented with assumptions objectified in the system's basic units (such as what constitutes citizenship, over what particular territory it extends, etc.)⁶⁵ — all subject to the constituency's tacit acceptance — it recognizes no higher secular authority. Although shifting focus and politics every decade or so,⁶⁶ liberalism ultimately assumes fixed, universally valid and inviolable principles not susceptible to democratic determination. It injects an additional level of transcendental authority above any democratic constituency — an element of undemocratic governance independent of popular control. This is part and parcel of that Enlightenment ideology which substituted reason for divine authority and

64. Cf. Schmitt's discussion of how liberalism destroys democracy and democracy liberalism in Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, tr. by George Schwab (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1976), pp. 69ff.

65. This concrete order is not only the most fundamental of what Schmitt identified as the three main types of legal frameworks, but is ultimately also the most viable. Far from being a mere scholastic exercise in theoretical jurisprudence, the contraposition of normativism and decisionism to the concrete order was meant to show how both the first two presupposed the latter. The concrete order is paradigmatically populist, since it is based precisely on those traditions, customs and institutions, as well as on the territoriality characterizing postmodern populism. Problematic as it may appear, Schmitt's contraposition of *lex* vs. *rex*, meant to unveil the *class* character of Kelsen's normativism and the decisionism of the legal agents it hypostatized to the level of *de facto* rulers, is a prototype of the more recent (albeit, less rigorous) critiques of the New Class. As for decisionism, it can aspire to concreteness only if the leader deploying it is grounded on the concrete social order rather than merely expressing the utopian predilections of a particular individual or of an elite of Enlightenment ideologues. See Schmitt, *Drei Arten . . .*, *op. cit.*

66. Already in the mid-1920s, Dewey complained that: "The irony of history is nowhere more evident than in the reversal of the practical meaning of the term 'liberalism' in spite of a literal continuity of theory." See Dewey, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

"rights"⁶⁷ for traditional ethos, paving the way for the empowerment of a class of guardians of these rights accountable to no one but itself and whose power is predicated on knowledge rather than capital or moral authority. Not surprisingly, within liberal democracy, liberalism and democracy are often at loggerheads, as in the case of increasing juridical and federal intervention in local affairs on the basis of "higher" mandates. Whenever this conflict becomes particularly intense, "populist" legitimacy tends to resurface as an "irrational" challenge to the transcendental rationality allegedly embodied in existing legality. This is all the more true of an American populism suspicious of transcendental liberal claims – at least to the extent that this nativist outlook perpetuates an idiosyncratic democratic tradition rooted in an 18th century colonial experience predicated on the fundamental prerogative to structure life according to *particularistic* readings of an allegedly universal Christian *Weltanschauung*. While formal in character, this contextualization of populism helps explain the phenomenon's periodic reappearance at times of legitimation crises, especially during transitions, when the old is seen as increasingly illegitimate and the new not yet sufficiently established.

This particular reading of populism, of course, is at odds with most standard historical accounts, which tend to reflect the times in which they were formulated. From Hicks and Woodward to Hofstadter to Goodwyn, the various histories and evaluations of populism have also been political statements concerning particular problems confronted at the time.⁶⁸ As Benedetto Croce never tired of emphasizing, however, all history is current history. Thus the postulation of a postmodern populism does not pretend to be merely another abstract exercise in academic historiography. It is consciously grounded in the concrete problematic of post-1989 political realities. The end of the Cold War has meant the collapse of that friend-enemy configuration which defined both international and domestic politics since the end of WWI and, more broadly, the last remnants of the *jus publicum Europaeum*. Without a totalizing other, liberalism's self-delusion

67. The ontological status of "rights" within liberal democracies is inherently ambiguous. They are neither "natural" nor contractual in character. In the first case, they would be part of a theological framework explicitly ruled out by the US and most other constitutions, while in the second, they would be subject to all the contingencies and qualifications associated with contractual arrangements. The contradictory assumption of both accounts within liberal democracies, especially in the US, allows the judiciary branch of government – the most unrepresentative and paradigmatically elitist of the three, constituting the most obvious form of New Class rule – to become the most powerful and intrusive.

68. See "Introduction" to McMath, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-16.

of being able to depoliticize social life through the state can no longer be maintained.⁶⁹ The most obvious expression of this predicament is the growing phenomenon of *ungovernability*. The frequent gridlocks in the US Congress, which in the past both major parties have blamed on each other, have nothing to do with the quality of the Washington personnel or with the sagacity of the leadership. It is a structural result of a system increasingly torn apart by an axiological heterogeneity no longer unified negatively by "the communist threat." By severing the constitutional framework from its Protestant axiological roots, the relativization of traditional WASP hegemony leaves the system without foundations other than the increasingly untenable ideology of human and civil rights — the ideology of a bureaucratic apparatus empowered with enforcing a mandate transcending normal democratic politics.

Today, the crisis of liberalism manifests itself in a growing motivational and rationality crisis to the extent that, the more it relies on state intervention and social engineering, the less it mediates between the particular and the universal, the individual and the state. Here enforcement replaces persuasion and *communal* relations become entirely *social*. This is due to the fact that formal relations between bureaucracies and citizens are not *intersubjective*, i.e., they do not establish an organic mutual bond between the two parties, but *asymmetrical*, i.e., they reify both within a new interactional context. Rather than *mediation*, bureaucratic rationality results in separation and isolation. Instead of diminishing, the relation of dependence grows as both sides reinforce their identities: one as a giving, active subject, the other as a receiving, passive object. Consequently, depoliticized citizens degenerate to the status of clients making ever greater demands on a state increasingly unable to meet them.

Postmodern populism resurfaces as an expression of the ensuing frustration with the growing democratic deficit, inefficiency and inadequacy. However, to the extent that it is a political movement explicitly opposing the power of intellectuals, experts and "professionals," i.e., practically the only people able to theoretically articulate ideas, including those of the new postmodern populism, it confronts considerable difficulty in translating its uneasiness into a concrete political alternative — notwithstanding the fact that almost all major national political figures present themselves as the potential paladins of a vague populist cause they do not fully understand. Despite his initial popularity as the spokesman for this growing

69. See Carl Schmitt, "The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations (1929)," in *Telos* 96 (Summer 1993), pp. 130-142.

populist frustration, Perot's political flip-flops during the past couple of years and his inability to draft a minimally coherent program of political reconstruction beyond worn-out nationalist parameters testify to the obstacles confronted by any new populist movement which does not begin by transcending the traditional Left-Right dichotomy and proposing a new political configuration pitting populists against the New Class, democracy against liberalism. Without such a preliminary political reconfiguration, even the most autonomous populist program is bound to be instrumentalized by either one of the two major parties to relegitimate the predominant system of liberal power relations at the expense of democratic participation, self-determination and autonomy.

Beyond Left and Right

While proposals to reconfigure political relations must initially seem hopelessly utopian, they may appear somewhat more realistic after a brief re-examination of the sad fate of both the Left and the Right. To the extent that both communism and liberalism were different, albeit antithetical manifestations of the same Enlightenment ideology, it may be possible to reconcile traditional Left and Right ideals within a new postmodern populist perspective — one uncontaminated by either the old but now mostly forgotten "bourgeois ideology" legitimating capitalist relations of domination or the "social homogenization" so dreaded by the old conservatives. The new populism can present itself as the possible answer to hitherto unsuccessful attempts to reconstruct both Left and Right in light of post-1989, postmodern realities. Repoliticized in contraposition to a liberalism redefined as New Class ideology, such a new populist coalition may be able to reformulate and place on the public agenda the question of qualitative social reforms so dear to the old Left while simultaneously redeploying those traditional ideals so cherished by the old Right and systematically eroded by New Class domination (local autonomy, individualism, cultural particularity, etc.).⁷⁰

In this respect, postmodern populism is continuous with, and may actually be regarded as the culmination of, the New Left's project of resurrecting the *critical spirit* of that Western Marxist tradition summarily destroyed a couple of generations earlier by Stalinism, fascism and McCarthyism. Both

70. For an account of how such a process has unfolded in France, see Alain de Benoist, "End of the Left-Right Dichotomy: The French Case," in *Telos* 102 (Winter 1995), pp. 73-90. For a more general analysis, see Marco Tarchi, "In Search of Right and Left," in this issue of *Telos*.

postmodern populism and the New Left are characterized by the attempt to find lingering signs of life in two allegedly defunct traditions — Marxism and the original populism — thriving only as part of the usual nostalgia for a golden past that never was. On closer scrutiny, however, this seemingly pathological concern with the vindication of an idealized past turns out to be the *sine qua non conditio* of any political project pretending to be minimally viable. It is only by reconstituting the past in terms of the needs of the present that it becomes possible not just to prefigure a qualitatively different future but also to re-establish a clear socio-historical identity. Without a sense of who one is it is impossible to imagine what one might become, independently of the cynically homogenized and sanitized “role models” so effectively marketed by the impeccably “heterogeneous” and “multicultural” culture industry — the propaganda arm of the New Class.

When most “official” political conflicts focus on *how* and *who* should administer what used to be criticized as the tendentially “totally administered society” (now assumed as a natural given), and when everyone defends “democracy” without bothering to inquire as to the institutional frameworks within which it can actually be practiced, it makes eminent sense to vindicate the spirit of movements originally concerned with people having something to say about decisions affecting their own lives.⁷¹ Uncontaminated by ideological imports having little to do with local conditions or by transcendental visions of a reality impossible to realize on *this* earth, populism was the only genuine American grass-roots movement concerned, in various contradictory and unelaborated ways, with direct democratic participation, economic justice, personal freedom and cultural autonomy — precisely the values the New Left, unaware of its past, sought to vindicate in the early 1960s. As such, it concretely embodied both the “American spirit” and the “American Dream” as totalizing ideals and political projects of social reconstruction.

Historically, Marxists, anarchists, libertarians and various strands of fascists (understood, with Zeev Sternhell and Renzo De Felice,⁷² as a Left-wing deviation) have all articulated anti-modernist sentiments against

71. For the New Left's original populist impulses (never explicitly acknowledged as such), see James Miller, “Democracy in the Streets.” *From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).

72. See Zeev Sternhell, *Ni Droite ni Gauche. L'Ideologie Fasciste en France* (Paris: Seuil, 1983); and Renzo De Felice's massive five volumes biography of Mussolini, especially Vol.1, *Mussolini il Rivoluzionario, 1883-1920* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965). Cf. also Paul Gottfried, “Le Origini di Sinistra del Fascismo: Spunti Critici sull'Opera di Zeev Sternhell,” in *Futuro Presente* 4 (Winter 1993), pp. 11-116.

a modernity seen as a *Brave New World*, "Modern Times" and a politically correct *Animal Farm*, but have emphasized only one or two of its aspects. To the extent that a number of these objectives are at least partly contradictory, it is impossible to devise an ideal program able to satisfy all. What to emphasize and what to overlook, and within which institutional contexts, are fundamental questions defining communities and cultures as *political* entities contraposed to other autonomous political entities. Precisely for this reason, it does not make sense to attempt to social engineer the "perfect community." There is no such entity, and when attempts are made to constitute it from above, the result is usually disastrous: the objectification of the *particular* perspective of some sectors of the "knowledge aristocracy." Today, such projects invariably end up reintroducing new modes of domination predicated on patronizing "victims," allegedly defending their interests but in fact reifying them and thereby simultaneously legitimating the privileged status of a New Class of managers and therapists. From the viewpoint of an emancipatory politics concerned with bringing about a society of autonomous individuals constituted within organic communities, it makes much more sense to let these allegedly discredited "organic communities" manage their own affairs, even if they may generate ecological problems or institutionalize questionable practices. The crucial differences between liberal, social democratic and welfare state societies, on the one side, and "organic communities" on the other, is that the latter are forced to learn from their own mistakes by bearing the cost of the consequences of their particular choices (thus emancipating themselves) or else disintegrating and becoming absorbed by other more viable communities. Contrary to traditional interpretations of their premodern variations as static entities impervious to change, postmodern organic communities totalized by territoriality and direct social interaction (rather than ethnicity, language, religion, etc.) may be susceptible, much more than the welfare state and social democracy, to the kind of *Bildung* without which, as Lasch has shown, no amount of consumption and opulence will ever lead to the "good" society of responsible citizens and compassionate human beings.⁷³

A populism of this kind can be seen as flowing from classical (not "orthodox") Marxism. As predicated by the old Lukácsian theory of reification, the welfare state de-activates ever growing numbers of citizens into clients perpetually dependent on a state-funded bureaucratic apparatus increasingly unable to carry out its functions – at least to the extent

73. Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995).

that most of the resources allocated for the task end up as subventions for the New Class of bureaucrats, therapists and other "professionals" allegedly needed to deliver inevitably underfunded and irreversibly deteriorating social services. This bureaucratic logic (which Lukács and the subsequent Hegelian Marxist tradition mistakenly reduced to the altogether different logic of capital) was assumed to automatically generate the subject-object of history – the proletariat as a class – which, coinciding with the growing rationality crisis of capitalism and mediated by the infamous Leninist party, would precipitate a cataclysmic social change resulting in the institutionalization of a socialism of equal, homogenized "social individuals" in this, "the best of all possible worlds."

One of the fatal flaws in any analysis of this kind is the privileging of the economic dimension and the marginalization of culture to the level of an irrelevant epiphenomenon – an error Marx himself did not make in *Capital*, which stops abruptly with the chapter on "class" (the category meant to perform the impossible task of translating the logic of capital into politics). The presupposed unilinear Christian theory of history, secularized into a theory of progress going from Adam and Eve to what Adorno cynically redescribed as the equivalent of Auschwitz, Hiroshima and the Gulag, was seen as fueled by an equally questionable Christian theodicy positing "greed" as the *fons et origo malorum* – a paradigmatically premodern predicament.

Even after postmodern relativism succeeded in convincing most leftists and liberals of the cultural specificity and historical obsolescence of this peculiarly Eurocentric vision, the social *desideratum* projected by the latter did not lose its pseudo-universal pretense; it was regrounded in various versions of that Rawlsian or Habermasian neo-Kantian presuppositional metaphysics according to which "universality" is no longer a function of faith, natural law or Platonic ontology but of what is presupposed by the very nature of discourse, as if linguistic transfers of conceptual packages were the only form of "discourse" and the metatheoretical framework positing the primacy of linguistic exchanges was not itself constituted by an ungrounded and ungroundable New Class *Weltanschauung*. Bottom line: as Dewey, Wittgenstein, Husserl and even Foucault came to realize (and before them the long tradition of thinkers from Goethe to the Right Hegelians), it is *community life*, rather than the much narrower division of labor which constitutes intersubjectivity and, *ipso facto*, subjectivity.

Contrary to what elitist liberal ideologues such as Habermas and his epigones assume, "community life" is not reducible to a group of

self-defined "intellectuals" puffing pipes around a table trying to reach a consensus. The first task of the new populism is to delegitimize this predominant New Class ideology as a precondition for broader projects of social and political reconstruction. This task is necessarily cultural in character. As with the old Western Marxist project, the fate of the new populism also rests on whether it will be able to achieve cultural hegemony.

What this philosophical detour implies is not only the primacy of culture and organic communities totalized by age-old collective experiences, but the fraudulence of any Enlightenment (bourgeois) hypostatization of a particularistic cultural perspective to the level of universality. It similarly poses the questions as to who today are the advocates of this particular ideology trying to pass it off as *universally* valid and whom does its unwarranted universalization benefit most. The new agents of pseudo-universality, the knowledge aristocracy, are much more elusive than the old capitalists, at least to the extent that they hide behind a self-righteous Robin Hood victimological ideology. Worse yet, while the individual capitalist is forced constantly to reconstitute a nomological totality whenever he has to make a business decision, therefore achieving that level of concreteness Lukács identified as the distinguishing characteristic of "praxis" and Adorno redefined as the "negative dialectic" of critically contraposing the abstract conceptual dimension to its particularistic otherness, the bureaucrat (or the professional intellectual) is terminally trapped in that abstract rationality whose projection onto reality generates the dialectic of enlightenment. The traditional Marxist critique of the bourgeoisie and its worldview (as articulated by intelligent Marxists such as Franz Borkenau) became obsolete in the post-1929 world and can regain its critical edge only if translated into a critique of administrative rationality and the New Class.

Far from constituting what orthodox and often even non-orthodox Marxists used to dismiss dogmatically as "romantic reaction" on the basis of a dogmatic theory of progress, this approach provides the "critical theoretical" vindication of the primacy of those organic communities the Frankfurt School, shell-shocked by the Holocaust and Nazi organicism, was unable and/or unwilling to defend. It not only grounds the new populism within the tradition of classical (pre-Habermas) Critical Theory but, more importantly, points a way out of the infamous "hibernation strategy" which forced Adorno & Co. into exile in what Lukács derided as the Hotel Abyss. It also provides a way out of the aporias of the theory of artificial negativity whereby the tendentially "totally administered society"

coopts all internal opposition as new modes of internal integration and therefore relegitimizes the predominant system of domination. In the same way the existentialists vindicated a minimal humanity against the Marxist-Leninist misreading of alienation as permanently disabling and reversible only via the external intervention of a New Class agency such as the Party, the new populism vindicates a residual organic negativity as that traditional dimension constituting the very precondition for social life as such and thus provides the permanent possibility of reconstituting even the most eroded organic communities — not as they “really were” but as they “should have been.”

This populist turn of Critical Theory paves the way for a political convergence between those sectors of the Left which have not altogether forgotten the traditional Marxist critique of liberalism as a “bourgeois ideology” and those sectors of the American Right which, unlike its European counterpart, was never “conservative” in the traditional sense of relegitimizing aristocratic prerogatives and has not yet been corrupted by neo-conservatism into a statist version of liberalism. If conservatism ever made any sense in the US it was in terms of conserving the cultural particularity typical of the colonial experience. In this sense, American conservatism, until its capitulation to New Deal cultural hegemony and neo-conservatism, was always in some sense populist. Yet, notwithstanding the euphoria generated by the 1994 election, the American Right is in shambles. The neo-conservatives are diametrically opposed to paleoconservatives and libertarians, while the New Right remains identified with dogma and intolerance. Recently, however, the latter has been rethinking its national objectives and, in the attempt to defend “conservative values,” it is willing to consider limiting its scope within those local communities in which it does in fact already have an overwhelming cultural stake, paving the way for a possible populist turn.

At any rate, most paleoconservative and libertarian agendas could readily co-exist with a Left true to its past and critical of any ideological capitulation to liberal identity politics. Until very recently, the Left never recognized gender, race or sexual proclivities as political dimensions — at least to the extent that such attributes do not automatically translate into political divisions and can do so only in a context of juridically pre-homogenized abstract individuality. Race, gender and sexual predilections can never totalize permanent political entities outside a context already depoliticized by the liberal state. Within genuine political contexts predicated on communal self-determination (where communities are

not confused with affinity subgroups or voluntary associations), the role of gender, race and sex is a function of the predominant cultural ethos. In this sense, the recent reduction of Left politics to the elimination of exclusionary practices based on racial, sexual or ethnic characteristics reflects its abysmal capitulation to liberal cultural hegemony presupposing the eternality of the liberal state and its questionable depoliticizing role.

From the perspective of whatever remains of a serious Left, the belated acknowledgment of the "New Class" character of the socialist project – something anarchists from Proudhon on have never failed to emphasize – can only lead to a vindication of precisely the kind of small productive proprietorship advocated by populists. After the collapse of "really existing socialism," few believe any longer in the democratizing role of the state's redistributive apparatus. If real democracy is not reducible to the liberals' juridical equality but has to do with the equality of power, and if power is not an abstract attribute but something rooted in property relations, then any meaningful democratizing project will have to aim at a generalized system of small productive proprietors: the traditional populist objective. Postmodern modes of industrial organization have somehow already learned the lesson: the central plan not only bankrupts socialist states but also large corporations which, during the past decade or so, cannot dismantle the corporate version of the "New Class" fast enough. Fat bureaucrats pushing unnecessary paper in over-formalized organizations clog the arteries of both state *and* capital. Thus a postmodern critique of capitalism will also have to become populist and challenge the entrenched *capitalist* New Class, usurping prerogatives legitimately belonging to private owners who will have to reassert the only true form of democratic ownership: direct control of private property.

Can a populism predicated on local autonomy, direct democracy and genuine federal modes of organization supplant the nation and its agents (the New Class) in a postmodern world of high tech, substantial economic integration and instant communication? A positive answer to this question could pave the way to a major political realignment in the 21st century – a reconfiguration able to address the kind of concrete problems presently impossible even to formulate within existing liberal politics. Demagogic calls for mandatory *national* ethical norms may give way to genuine community self-determination regarding cultural matters; welfare may no longer be contraposed to an equally meaningless and debilitating "workfare" in a context where the old *caritas* and organic modes of labor allocations regulate and redefine the division of labor; motherhood

may stop meaning second-class citizenship for women; free-trade may no longer translate into job-exportation and potential rule by a distant and unaccountable global bureaucratic apparatus, etc.

Contrary to the predominant liberal view of the future as doom and gloom, civil wars, dead cities, cretinized cultures and robotized drug-dependent individuals, populism's recycling of a simpler life within functioning organic communities provides the kind of hope without which no process of social reconstruction is even conceivable. Unlike in the past, however, when the direction of technological developments, capitalist growth and cultural homogenization seemed to make such an outlook appear as unrealistically nostalgic, utopian and romantic, postmodern realities have radically altered the social landscape. In the age of the micro-computer, instant communication, cultural heterogeneity and universal education, the populist project is suddenly, for the first time, not only in tune with predominant trends but in a position to confront its modernist adversaries on their own ground.

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